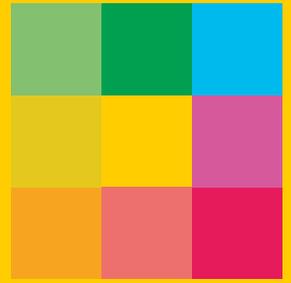


# CHOICES CONNECTIONS CHANGE

ANNUAL REVIEW  
2017-18



**MISSINGLINK.**  
cutting edge  
women's mental health services

**NEXTLINK.**  
changing the face of  
domestic abuse support services

**SAFELINK.**  
transforming victims' lives



**the Annual Report of Missing Link Mental Health Services, Next Link Domestic Abuse Services and SAFE Link Rape and Sexual Abuse Services.**

All three have a reputation for delivering comprehensive services that have a holistic approach, offer best value and are well respected in the Mental Health and Domestic and Sexual Abuse fields. The combination of the three services gives the organisation skills and expertise that are unmatched in any other organisation.

**A RECENT EMAIL FROM A CLIENT..**

“ Hi I was a client back in 1995 , I lived at fox rd for roughly 12 months, just wanted to thanku all for Ur love and care, I learnt so much and improved so much whilst under Ur care, my support worker at that time was great, I then went onto be in a supported housing flat in Hartcliffe wiv the Richmond Fellowship, I was wiv them for 12 months or so, I moved to Cornwall back in 1997 and received mental health support wiv a CPN, I’m now living independently in a flat of my own, and I no longer need input from the mental health team, I have fond memories of the missing Link staff and other clients, just wanted to tell u of my gratitude.



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For over 34 years Missing Link has successfully supported homeless women with complex needs to recover, secure and sustain housing and live full and rewarding lives. We are the largest provider of women-only services in Bristol bringing innovation, expertise, established partnerships and extensive experience of engaging women in our wide ranging support services.

We provide a range of housing and support to women who have either acute or long term mental health needs. We support women who are homeless, sleeping rough or whose housing is at risk because of their mental health issues. We also provide a direct access service, Link House, as an alternative to psychiatric admission.

We specialise in working with women who have complex needs including substance misuse, offending and self-harm. Our support has a holistic focus looking at health, social care and mental health. All our support is tailored to each woman’s needs, and builds on their individual strengths to help them to improve their well-being, secure their housing and sustain their long term recovery.

**Take up of services**

During the year Missing Link offered a range of support services and housing services to **864 women.**



“ Thanks for saving my life, as I can now see there is so much to live for, and I can get better.

**1 in 3 girls**  
between the ages of  
11-19 have self-  
harming behaviour



### High and Medium Support Women's Homelessness Pathway

A new women's homelessness pathway was established in October 2017 and Missing Link is working in close collaboration with key partners, St Mungo's, Elim Housing and Places for People to take a whole pathway approach. This is to improve the experience of clients moving on through the various levels of supported accommodation while optimising support available to them through joint working.

### New Ways House

This is our high support 6 bedded accommodation service with staff on site 6 days a week and with an on call out of hours service. Women can stay for up to 4 months. The aim of New Ways is to provide a higher level of support to help women access and engage with other specialist services and to take the first steps towards developing the necessary skills to move on successfully into longer term accommodation.

During their stay women will have a flexible outcome focussed support plan including help with substance misuse, mental health issues,

**“ I am learning how to manage my ill times better by having a plan.**

offending, building confidence, life skills and training. Support includes one to one, peer support, group activities and practical skills sessions.

The service is accessed through the Housing Support Register.

This year we housed and supported **16 women.**

### Medium Level Supported Housing

Our shared houses are provided across Bristol and range from 7 self-contained flats to shared 2, 3 and 4 bedroomed houses. Women can stay for up to 9 months.

The aim of this housing and support is to act as a stepping stone to more independent living. Women can stay for up to 9 months to consolidate their recovery and successfully move into lower support or more independent accommodation. Staff provide practical and emotional support including group activities, drop-ins, peer support, one to one sessions and support at evenings and weekends through an out of hours emergency on call system.

The service is accessed through the Housing Support Register.

This year we housed and supported **58 women.**

### Women's Mental Health Floating Support Service

This service provides housing related support, advice and/or assistance to vulnerable women living with acute and enduring mental health support needs that impact on their ability to maintain their housing. We offer resettlement support to women who are moving into new accommodation and tenancy support to women in their existing housing. The service is available regardless of mental health

diagnosis or statutory care eligibility. The aim of the support is to improve mental health and physical wellbeing, including crisis management, facilitating access to other specialist support services and liaising with those services as appropriate.

It includes help with managing money, settling into a new community, finding voluntary work or training courses and help to find activities during the day. There is a high level of support in the beginning which is gradually reduced as the women feel better able to manage. The service works with women aged over 16, support is for up to one year in the first instance.

Our floating support services provided support for **150 women.**

We also offer a telephone support and triage service to women on the HSR support waiting list.



“ I think being able to talk to her without any judgement has allowed me to get to the root of the issue, and with that knowledge I’ve been more able to stay in control.



### Outreach Service

This service works with homeless women with mental health needs who have lost or are at threat of losing their tenancy because of a severe mental health need or are in hospital and are unable to return to their previous accommodation. They may be sleeping rough, living in Bed and Breakfast, in temporary and/or unsuitable housing, or in between tenancies.

The service is city wide and will take referrals from any route. The service will maintain close links with acute mental health services including admission wards and community mental health teams.

This year we supported **64 women.**

### Dedicated Self Harm Worker

A large number of women who use our services self-harm. Managing their self-harm remains a priority for them and we have a specialist worker to work with this issue.

The worker will work with a range of forms of self-harm including cutting, overdosing, alcohol and drug misuse and eating disorders, the worker will also work with women with dual diagnosis. The dedicated worker works as part of the Missing Link team and undertakes preventative and harm reduction work with any woman who is receiving our services.

During this year we worked with **82 women.**

**97%** had a better understanding of their self-harm since seeing the dedicated support worker. **92%** said their self-harm reduced in frequency. **100%** had alternative strategies to turn to, to help prevent a self-harm incident.

Of the **1.15million** people in the UK who have an eating disorder; **90%** are women

### Counselling Service

Our counsellor works with any women who use our services. She offers support with some of the underlying psychological issues that may have resulted in homelessness or mental ill health. The counsellor offers each woman a set number of sessions followed by a review. She works closely with the other support workers and is included in the service user’s support plan.

This year we received **147 referrals** and worked with **98 women.**

**97%** had a better understanding of their self-harm since seeing the dedicated support worker.



## Link House for Women in Mental Health Crisis

Link House is for women who are experiencing a mental health crisis and are unable to cope in the community. It works to a social care model of recovery. It provides safe, high quality support that has an emphasis on the immediate crisis while also focusing on building resilience, support networks and maintaining good mental health on returning home.

The service is an integrated part of the mental health care pathway, has proved to be invaluable to mental health services and has been very successful in preventing hospital admissions and for those who are admitted into hospital, reducing their length of stay.

During the year we have piloted an emergency bed for referrals from the Crisis Teams to ensure that more women in crisis can receive the support of Link House at the time that they need it.

Co-production with women using our service is a priority to us. The Crisis House User Reference Group (CHURG) meets every 6 weeks and is well attended. They have been consulted on house rules, policy, literature, activities and are exploring a peer support group for both current and ex residents.

This year we supported **159 women.**

“ Link House gave me the opportunity to learn its OK, its OK to be selfish, its OK to just look after yourself for a change. I've learnt I am important.



“ I feel like Link House has saved me and built me back up again.



100% said they would recommend Link House to a friend.

Admissions rates for self-harm are much higher for women in Bristol than men

## Satisfaction Survey

Listening to residents experience and ideas is central to everything we do and a fundamental core value. One of the ways in which women who use Link House can feed back their views is to complete an exit questionnaire.

This year the survey was completed by **122 women** and showed that:

- 99% found their stay a helpful experience
- 99% said the support was responsive to their needs
- 94% said they felt their mental health had improved
- 100% found the activities and group sessions helpful
- 100% said they would recommend Link House to a friend.

“ I felt emboldened to tackle issues and demons from my past which were dragging me down.

## Bristol Mental Health

Missing Link is one of the 17 organisations which together make up Bristol Mental Health. We are one of four voluntary community sector organisations: Second Step ([www.second-step.co.uk](http://www.second-step.co.uk)), Off the Record ([www.otrbristol.org.uk](http://www.otrbristol.org.uk)), Nilaari Care ([www.nilaari.co.uk](http://www.nilaari.co.uk)) that work with AWP and employ staff within the Bristol Assessment and Recovery Services. Staff roles include Recovery Navigators, Mental Health Crisis workers, Facilitated Discharge workers, and Peer Support workers based in hubs in North, Central and South Bristol.

## Community Rehabilitation Services

We are a partner in the Bristol Community Rehabilitation Service. This service, led by Second Step, is a hub and spoke model and supports people from across Bristol. The Community Rehabilitation Service specialises in working with people with long-term mental health and complex needs. Its focus is to help people gain the skills and confidence to live as independently as possible in the community. We second staff to the service, they provide a range of interventions to help women manage their mental health problems more effectively and to live as independently as possible.

To find out more about this service call 0117 909 6630.

### Golden Key

We are a Golden Key partner. Golden Key is an innovative city wide partnership led by Second Step with an eight-year programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. We are working together to change the way services respond to people with complex and multiple needs including a broad spectrum of those furthest from services. Our Golden Key coordinator,

employed by Missing Link, brings our specialist expertise in supporting homeless women with high complex needs to the service. We also take part in the operations group and attend the partnership board.

To find out more about the service please contact **0117 909 6630** or visit website [www.goldenkeybristol.org.uk/our-story](http://www.goldenkeybristol.org.uk/our-story)



### Volunteering Programme

Volunteers are highly valued as part of our organisation. They bring energy, enthusiasm and wide ranging skills to build the capacity in our services. Women with lived experience bring a vital understanding and an extra dimension to our work and what we can achieve. Without volunteers, some of our most important and effective services would not be able to operate.

This year we had the support of **52 volunteers.**

If you want to know more about **volunteering** please call **0117 925 1811** or text **07714 290011**

“Volunteering changed my life you get so much back and can make such a difference.”

### Hospital Admission Prevention, Early Discharge

Missing Link were involved in a successful pilot in partnership with Second Step, Golden Key, Missing Link, BDP and 1625 to reduce the impact of winter pressures on A&E and hospital services within Bristol. We employed a Service User Co-ordinator who worked closely with hospital teams to identify suitable referrals to the project, with the aim of reducing the length of hospital stay or the number of admissions for women with complex needs.

### Wellbeing Therapies Service

Our Wellbeing Therapies Service in Bristol and South Gloucestershire offers psychological support including CBT sessions at community venues and our head office. The service is open to self-referrals plus anyone who has been referred by their GP.

We have supported **98 women** this year through the Wellbeing Service.

“I have been able to use coping strategies and urgent distractions to not self-harm.”



**99%** said the support was responsive to their needs

Bristol has the **second highest** suicide rate for women in England

“Tailored one to one sessions, with helpful, knowledgeable supportive staff.”

**Two thirds of women in prison have serious mental health problems**



**Mental health disorders are up to three times more prevalent in women than men**



**100% had alternative strategies to turn to, to help prevent a self-harm incident.**

### Service User Consultation and Involvement Co-production

Missing Link has always seen user consultation and involvement in the planning, reviewing and delivery of our services as pivotal in the setting of standards for our service provision and development.

This year a Co-Production Project Worker was recruited to work across Missing Link, Next Link and Safe Link to embed meaningful service user involvement across the organisation. Monthly service user forum groups have been established and attended by over 20 women. The groups have met to discuss satisfaction surveys, peer support group, involvement in staff training and recruitment. Women from these groups have also been involved in audits and consultations with commissions and partners media campaigns and represented the organisation at a range of events.

**“ If it wasn't for this group I would be six feet under. ”**

### Peer Support

Missing Link are working in partnership with Changes, a local mental health charity, to develop a peer support group; women can share what's going on for them in a safe, confidential space with other women who may have similar experiences. Existing and former clients have the opportunity to train to become facilitators helping them to develop skills, self-confidence and self-esteem. We also ran a peer activities group for women affected by homelessness offering a range of activities including creative writing.

### Women's Support Services Group

Missing Link co-ordinates the Women's Support Services Group – It's membership includes organisations providing a range of support services for women across Bristol. The group provides a forum for raising issues and concerns, sharing training and best practice and networking across services – to improve the care pathways into services for women.

**“ The programme is life changing. ”**

## OUR CORE VALUES

**MISSINGLINK. NEXTLINK. SAFELINK.**



**Missing Link, Next Link and Safe Link are committed to the following core values:**

### To treat people as individuals

We believe in providing high quality personalised support, tailored to women's needs. Our support packages will provide an appropriate level of flexible support to maximise independence and self-determination.

### To challenge commonly held misconceptions about mental ill health

We recognise the importance of addressing negative attitudes and perceptions about mental illness and how it is experienced. In our work we will challenge any prejudice or assumptions that prevent people from seeking help and realising their full potential.

### To challenge commonly held myths about domestic abuse

We will challenge the many myths surrounding domestic abuse that make survivors feel that domestic violence is their fault and they are to blame for not leaving their violent partner. In our work we will make clear the reality of domestic abuse and tackle the obstacles that prevent women from seeking help.

### To challenge commonly held assumptions about rape and sexual assault

We know that rape and sexual assaults on women happen far more than people think and the statistics indicate. In our work we will raise awareness of the issue and challenge assumptions that the women's behaviour and dress is often seen to be responsible for the attack.

### Equal Opportunity

We are aware that domestic and sexual violence and mental ill health occur in all cultures and communities. We will strive to ensure that all women are treated with fairness and equity and that the organisation and its services are accessible to all.

### Empowerment

We understand how domestic and sexual violence and mental ill health can make women feel disempowered and devalued. To challenge this we will ensure that the experience and ideas of the women and children that we support are heard and that we maximise their participation in the design, delivery and development of our services.

### Cultural Diversity

We are committed to ensuring that the Organisation and its services are inclusive and reflect the rich cultural diversity of the community we live in. We understand that women and children from Black and Ethnic Minority communities have to face the extra dimension of discrimination so we will offer culturally sensitive dedicated services.

This will encourage women to come forward, seek help and give them a real choice about how they want to be supported.

### Quality Children and Young People's Services

We understand the importance of children and young people having their own individual support. We recognise the value of play as a therapeutic tool in the recovery process and will provide quality play and activities within a safe and stimulating environment. We will engage and help children and young people to express their feelings, build resilience and receive specialist support.

“ *When I was first referred, I was very isolated, afraid and alone.* ”

### Safe Quality Housing

We are committed to the provision of quality housing services that are responsive, accountable, meet the needs of the women and children that use them and are of a standard that re-enforces their self-esteem.

“ *Less stress, more coping skills.* ”



### Partnership Working

We are committed to a holistic approach to our service users' needs and recognise that our service is a part of a patchwork of services that are required. This holistic approach can only be achieved through collaboration and co-operation with local and national authorities, health, police and voluntary and statutory sectors.

### Quality and Efficiency

We have in place systems and procedures that make the best use of the resources available to us. We are committed to providing an effective value for money service while at the same time maintaining quality in order to achieve the best possible outcomes for the women and children that come to us for help.

### To offer quality advice and advocacy to enable clients to make informed choices about their lives.

We know that many victims suffer in silence because they do not know what options there are available to them to live without fear of attack. With our telephone support and face to face advice sessions we will ensure that all the legal, civil and support remedies are given to each caller that seeks help.

### Campaigning and Raising Awareness

We are committed to campaigning to stop violence against women and children in all its forms. We will work collaboratively with our partners to promote the issues, highlight the importance of prevention and strive to reduce the impact of gender-based violence. We know that any assessment of women's mental health must consider the full context of their lives.

“ *I had a great support worker who got me to come out of my comfort zone.* ”



## MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE REPORT

This year has been one of growth and consolidation. We were delighted to have Sue Mounstevens the Police and Crime Commissioner and Amanda Deeks Chief Executive of South Glos. Council launch the new South Gloucester Next Link services. These new services provide both traditional and innovative ways to support victims of Domestic Abuse and are now embedded into the whole of Next Link.

The combination of these services makes us one of the largest domestic abuse providers in the South West. It is an honour to have such an important role in the region and we will ensure our services are consistent and instrumental in saving victims lives and supporting them to live free from the fear of violence.

Our Missing Link and SAFE Link services have also generated new income to extend the services we can offer.

Every year Missing Link, Next Link and SAFE Link continue to provide essential services that respond to need and are innovative and cost

effective. Over the year the combined services supported thousands of clients to overcome the trauma, of sexual violence and domestic abuse. We also supported hundreds of women with mental ill health to recover and rebuild their lives.

As always, our service users were key to the development and delivery of our current and new services. Their comments and feedback are reflected throughout the report and their energy continues to inspire us to do better.

I want to thank the various groups and individuals that have fundraised for us; we really appreciate people's commitment particularly as traditional funding is being cut. In these times of austerity donations become more essential if we are to give victims the holistic support they need.

I would also like to thank the committee members, staff, volunteers and service users for all the hard work and passion that has made the organisation so dynamic and effective.

**Cathy Morgan** | Chair

### Management Committee

CHAIR  
**Cathy Morgan**  
*Consultant*

**Iona Phillips**  
*Solicitor*

**Mary Welsh**  
*Retired GP*

TREASURER  
**Rowena Hastings**  
*Recovery Service Manager AWP*

**Vicky O'Loughlin**  
*Press and Communications Manager (retired)*

**Megan Baker**  
*Student*

**Joi Demery**  
*Mental Health Manager (retired)*

**Danielle Rowan**  
*Named Professional for Safeguarding Children and Domestic Abuse BNSSG*



A kind donation from Bristol Hash House Harriers



## KEY EVENTS OF THE YEAR

### Launch of South Gloucestershire Domestic Abuse Services

Over 70 people attended the event including a range of professionals, victims and representatives from the police. Key speakers were Sue Mounstevens Police Crime Commissioner and Amanda Deeks the Chief Executive of South Gloucestershire Council. A highlight of the event was a young victim singing two songs she had chosen that reflected her experience and her recovery. The event was a great success and received excellent media coverage and as a result we saw an increase in the number of victims coming forward to seek help.



### THRIVE Bristol

Thrive Bristol is a new ten year whole-city programme (began in 2018) to improve the mental health and wellbeing of everyone in Bristol, with a focus on those with the greatest needs. Within the THRIVE programme there is a work stream on Mental Health and Domestic Abuse which is chaired by Next Link CEO Carol Metters and Professor Gene Feder. This is an exciting opportunity for us to work in partnership to create different responses to address domestic abuse within the Health and Social Care networks across the city.



### Visit from Bristol Councillor Helen Godwin and Jacqui Jenson

Jacqui is the BCC Executive Director of Care and Safeguarding responsible for Adult Social Care, Children's Services, and Educational Improvement. Helen is Cabinet Member, Women, Children and Young

People, Bristol City Council. Both are very passionate about domestic abuse and ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and came to talk to staff and listen to service users talking about their experiences.

### UWE Volunteer of the Year Award

One of our volunteers in SAFE Link won the UWE volunteer of the year award. She and her team leader went to the award ceremony and were able to promote the organisation and attract more volunteers.



### SAFE Link

SAFE Link in partnership with Womankind was awarded Home Office funding (applied for on our behalf by Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commission)

SAFE Link has been funded to provide a specialist ISVA and Womankind are funded to provide a specialist

befriending service. The partnerships aim is to work together to improve lives and build resilience for the most vulnerable victims of sexual assault with additional needs linked to either learning difficulties or mental ill-health across Avon & Somerset. The worker is in post and already has a full case load.



### Candle Lit Vigil

To mark International Anti-violence against Women week we held our annual candle lit procession from Queen Square to College Green. We have held this event for 19 years and this year Police and Crime Commissioner Sue Mounstevens spoke at the gathering and

Alison Comley MBE, Strategic Director BCC Neighbourhoods read out a poem. 2 victims lit candles to honour the 2 women who are killed each week by a violent partner.

Each year the vigil has generated an increase in victims seeking help.

**Personality Disorder In-house Training**

We commissioned this bespoke training from a survivor who is a professional trainer. She worked with staff and service users to design a training package and delivered it with a manager and a service user. We have rolled it out across the organisation and it will be part of our core training.



**Perpetrator Research Programmes**

We have taken part in two research programmes with Advance and Respect. The Advance programme works with perpetrators who have drink/drug dependencies and Respect works with any perpetrator. Our IDVAs are trained to offer support to the partners of the men on the programme.



**Visit from Councillor Rachael Hunt, Chair of South Gloucestershire Council**

Rachael came to visit the organisation and meet with staff and volunteers; she also visited a safe house to talk to service users first-hand about their experiences.

Domestic Abuse is something she feels strongly about and she has nominated Next Link to be the Council's charity of the year.



**Advice Quality Standard**

We have achieved AQS kite mark again this year for the sixth year running. The accreditation confirms we deliver well-managed domestic abuse services. Available by accessing our single point of access or through our live chat facility where all staff have the relevant up to date knowledge to provide high quality advice to victims, professionals and others seeking help.

**South Gloucestershire Excellence in Practice award**

We were delighted that our senior Safe House worker won this award for demonstrating best practice in tackling domestic abuse.



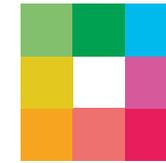
**Peer Support Co-ordinator**

We were delighted to be given a grant by the Quartet Foundation from The Grove Fund to run peer support groups for victims using Next Link and Safe Link. Being with people with lived experience can help breakdown the isolation victims feel and build their recovery.



**Bristol University Impact Award**

IRISi won the Policy and Practice award for improving the primary health care response to domestic violence and abuse.



**NEXTLINK.**  
changing the face of  
domestic abuse support services



### Visitors from IRAQ

We had a visit from a group of people from the Kurdish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs. They were interested in setting up refuges in the Kurdish region of IRAQ. The visit was arranged by STEP which is a UK charity that works in IRAQ. The group were very interested in how we worked with honour based killing, domestic abuse and how we supported children. They were keen to share ideas about how we supported victims to keep them safe.



### Women's Information Sharing Fair

For a third consecutive year we delivered an Information Sharing Fair as part of Homelessness Awareness week in February. Over 20 organisations involved in delivering services to women had stalls. The meeting also gathered support for our commitment to retain women only services within Bristol. The event was launched by Victoria Bleazard, Programme Manager: Bristol 'One City Plan' and Thrive Bristol and was attended by 60 people from over 35 agencies, including the Police, Lighthouse, Probation, Health services and Bristol City Council commissioners.



### Visitor from Hannover

We had a visit from a councillor from Hannover who is in Bristol as an intern with the City Council. She met with staff and

suggested we may like to twin with a domestic abuse provider in Hannover and we are looking into how that may work.





Next Link Domestic Abuse Services come under the umbrella of Missing Link. Next Link has been providing domestic abuse services in the city for the last 19 years. During that time the services have expanded and innovative new services have been developed. Next Link has built an excellent reputation for best practice quality services for victims and their families.

### Take up of services this year

Overall take up of Bristol services

During this year we gave support to **2313 women** and **964 children**.

We also gave advice and information to many more.

### Referrals to All Bristol Services

The service has a single point of access and referrals can be received by telephone, fax, or email. We also have LiveZilla (live chat line) active on our duty desk from 1.00pm – 5.30pm Monday – Friday.

All referrals are triaged by our duty team who ask women about their situation, the number of children they have with them, what areas of the city are unsafe for them and whether they want a safe house, community support, crisis response or a dedicated BME service. We carry out a DASH risk assessment on all referrals and if appropriate refer to the Domestic Violence MARAC.

**2313 women  
and 964 children  
supported this year.**



At least **750,000** children a year witness domestic violence

*“ I know the kids saw it all and its great to know they are getting specialist help.”*

### Bristol Safe Houses

We have seven safe houses in the city including a dedicated house for black and ethnic minority women and children, a house for single women, a complex needs house and a block of self-contained units. In the safe houses we can house up to 38 families at any one time. The housing is direct access and women and children can move in immediately and stay for up to six months.

Where possible, when families move on, we offer resettlement support to enable them to settle into their new communities. For the women who return to their partners we encourage them to keep in touch in case they need to use a safe house again.

This year we received **569 referrals**. We housed **100 families** with **105 children**. Of the 100 families we housed 1 returned to their violent partner.

### Complex Needs Safe House

This is a unique service to Bristol offering support to women who would perhaps be turned down from generic safe houses due the complexity of their needs. The service offers a safe house for eight women at high risk of domestic abuse with additional support needs such as unmanaged substance misuse or mental health issues.

This year we received 62 referrals and have housed 30 women. We have a weekly support group run by BDP operating out of the house which is designed to support the women to access specialist substance misuse services whilst they are in a safe and calm environment.

We also worked closely with ROADS providers, Housing and Safer Bristol to form a referral panel to ensure we are accessible to the most vulnerable women within Bristol.

### Community Support Service

This service offers resettlement support to families moving on from the safe houses and tenancy support to women whose tenancy is at risk because of domestic abuse. Practical and emotional support is given to help families to keep safe, settle into their new home or remain in their own home.

Also help with any court proceedings, making grant applications, registering with a doctor and schools or nurseries and planning the future. The support is offered for up to six months and is gradually withdrawn when the family is integrated into their community. We also provide drop in surgeries in central and east Bristol.

This year we received **806 referrals** and the service supported **622 women** and **859 children**.



### Northern and Southern Arc's

These services are part of our community support and are based in the North and South of the city. It is well documented that victims find it difficult to leave their neighbourhoods to seek help. These services reach into communities and have offices in south of the city in Hartcliffe and one in the North at Lawrence Weston. We also provide drop in surgeries at a range of local community venues these include Southmead Project; Brentry and Henbury Children's Centre; Long Cross Children's Centre; South Bristol Hospital; Headley Park Health Centre and Bishopsworth Children's Centre.

Each service responds to local need and offers high quality front line support to survivors and their children to increase their safety, prevent repeat victimisation and reduce levels of physical and psychological injury.

We provide outcome focused support to victims who want to remain at home safely and remove the violent partner, victims who are yet to leave their abusive partners, and victims who need to go into a safe house. The services also support any victim who wishes to use the criminal justice process to prosecute the perpetrator.

This year the services supported **166 families** – 93 in the Northern Arc and 73 in the Southern Arc.

To contact the **Northern Arc** call **0117 9822495**

To contact the **Southern Arc** call **0117 3533853**

One third of female suicide attempts can be attributed to current or past experience of domestic violence

### Crisis Response Service

This service is part of our triage team and offers intensive crisis support to women and children who are threatened with homelessness because of domestic abuse.

Often women become homeless when they are in a domestic abuse crisis because they feel there are no other options but to leave the violent home. This service responds the same day and will assist women to access emergency legal remedies to help her stay in her own home and extra security in the home to keep the family safe.

The worker will go with women to a solicitor and escort them to court.

When it is not safe to stay the worker will find safe housing accommodation within the city or outside of Bristol.

The support is part of a care pathway and offered for 4 weeks and then if appropriate the family moves seamlessly to other Next Link services.

This year the service supported **796 families**.

Of the **100 families** we housed **1** returned to their violent partner.

“ I am starting to breathe again without waiting for the next attack.”



The services worked with **263** children and young people.

“ I can't say how relieved I am to see the kids smiling again.

### Dedicated children and young people's services

These services prioritise the needs of the children who use our services and have either witnessed or experienced domestic abuse. We provide a range of support including one to one support, after school clubs, play schemes, help with enrolling in schools and nurseries. We also help children integrate into their new communities when they leave the safe house. Our services regularly pass an Ofsted inspection.

This year the services worked with **263 children and young people.**

In our safe house **100%** understood more about the impact of DV on their children.



### Domestic Violence Groupwork Services

The main outcome of this project is to empower women to make positive choices when beginning new relationships after surviving Domestic Violence and Abuse.

We do this with the;

- **Freedom Programme** – for women over 18 who can have left the violent relationship or still be in it, to help name and recognise the behaviours in order to understand domestic abuse.
- **Recovery Toolkit** – for women who have left the relationship and are ready to move on and build on their self-esteem and confidence and start the next chapter of their lives.
- **CRUSH** – for young people who have witnessed/experienced or perpetrated abuse to understand healthy relationships so that they can seek these out moving forward.

This year we have partnered with MW Social Care Training who has won the contract to deliver Safeguarding Adults and Domestic Violence & Abuse (DVA) Training days to newly qualified social workers throughout 2018. This opportunity means that Next Link have a unique platform to talk to newly qualified professionals about all of the work we do including the benefits of Groupwork and how to refer.

This year over **400 women** were referred and the service supported **200 women.**

“ There is always a safe way to leave your partner.





### Dedicated Services for Black and Ethnic Minorities

Specific BME services

- Forced Marriage HBV
- Dedicated Polish, South Asian workers
- Dedicated IDVA court worker

We recognise the importance of diversity and to ensure our services are inclusive we have a dedicated BME woman's safe house and worker. We also have a dedicated BME resettlement worker and dedicated South Asian and Polish crisis response workers.

This year in the safe houses **55%** of families came from black and ethnic minority communities. In our community services **34%** of families came from black and ethnic minority communities.

Domestic violence costs the public purse **£23 billion** a year

**55%** of families came from black and ethnic minority communities.

“ A welcoming, warm wonderful space, like a home from home.

### South Asian Domestic Abuse Crisis Response Service

Domestic abuse is a major cause of homelessness for South Asian women. Our dedicated South Asian workers provide crisis intervention to South Asian women and children who are experiencing domestic abuse.

The workers assist families in crisis, they offer culturally sensitive support and help to access legal and practical remedies to enable women and children to remain in their family home and lower repeat incidents of domestic abuse.

This service has proven to be extremely successful at both supporting women and raising the issue of domestic abuse within South Asian communities.

This year the service supported **140 BME women.**

We also have a dedicated Polish worker who has successfully engaged with Polish victims and victims from Eastern Europe.

This year the service supported **79 Eastern European women.**

### Forced Marriage Honour Based Violence Service

As a result of the pilot funded by the Home Office Forced Marriage Unit we were able to use the results of the pilot to generate funding to provide a service for victims who have either been forced into marriage or those at risk of forced marriage or honour based violence. The service

offers confidential advice and support to look at all the options available including accessing legal remedies and help to plan their future.

This year the service supported **9 women** who were at risk of forced marriage or had been through a forced marriage and **61 who were fleeing HBV.**

“ Staff and others were so supportive, thank you for just being amazing.

### Forced Marriage Honour Based Violence Training Programme

This year we ran two training sessions, one for South Glos. and one for Bristol Safeguarding. We also led a Forced Marriage and HBV open day in Bristol.

Our web based chat/advice facility which enables people to access real time advice anonymously is up and running. The Facebook page also links to our website and live chat.



In our safe house **85%** felt more confident about their parenting skills

### The IRIS Service Bristol and South Glos Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS)

We have two IRIS workers in Bristol who support all of the city's GP practices to access the service. Our IRIS service in South Gloucestershire is fully embedded with all practices engaged.

For many victims of domestic abuse going to see the doctor is the only safe place they can go without their violent partner present. Our specialist domestic violence advocate-educators (IRIS) train and support primary care

clinicians to recognise domestic abuse and refer their female patients to our service. The IRIS workers offer emotional and practical support to all victims referred and if appropriate help to access a range of specialist services.

In Bristol this year the service supported **205 women** and trained **113 clinical** and **103 non clinical staff.**

In South Glos we supported **74 families** and trained **61 clinical** and **10 non clinical staff.**

“ It’s the first time I have felt valued – someone wants to know what I think.

### Family Intervention Teams

We are working in partnership with Bristol Early Help Team and have three domestic abuse workers based in the north, south and central Family Intervention Teams. The workers consult with early help key workers to help recognise domestic violence and abuse, improving professional responses and support for victims. The workers then offer direct support to the mothers and children identified.

### Early Help Intervention Outreach Workers

We were successful in a VAWG bid led by BCC to provide two Early Help IDVA’s based in the three FIT teams across the city. They work closely with the community police who respond to domestic abuse calls, they also work with schools and other professionals and offer the women support and safety options.



This year our Crisis Response Service supported **796 families**



### Advice Quality Standard Mark

We have the Advice Quality Standard accreditation for our advice and guidance work. The AQS accreditation confirms we deliver well-managed domestic abuse advice services, provide ongoing help, ensuring staff have relevant, up-to-date knowledge providing high quality advice. This year we received **3,055 phone calls** and **gave advice to over 2,400 people.**

We also have **LiveZilla (live chat line)** active on our duty desk from **1.00pm – 5.30pm Monday – Friday.**

### Survivors Participation and Feedback

We firmly believe that domestic abuse services should be informed and guided by survivors. Throughout the year we have consulted with the women and children that use our services on new initiatives and their experience of our services. They have also been involved in recruitment of staff, fundraising and talking to the media and key stakeholders about their experience of domestic and sexual abuse.

In our safe house  
**96%** of people leaving **felt safer,**  
**96%** felt more able to **recognise abusive behaviour**  
**96%** felt their **support networks improved.**



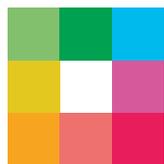
We received **3,055** phone calls and gave advice to **over 2,400** people.

### Promoting the Service and Raising Awareness of Domestic and Sexual Abuse

Throughout the year we have participated in events including Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence Awareness Week, Southmead Festival, PRIDE, Women’s Information Sharing Fair, Cop Shop with PCC, Elimination of Violence Against Women Vigil, Domestic Violence Awareness Month, Hartcliffe fun day, Blue Monday, “refuge” play at Alma Vale theatre followed by panel discussion and International Women’s Day. We believe promotion is the key to raising awareness of the impact of domestic and sexual violence on women, children and men and to ensure that information about our services is readily available and accessible.

We know that domestic and sexual abuse is on the increase and there are many victims still living in fear that do not access or know about the help that is available.

Our commitment is to continue to raise these issues at a local and national level and at the same time reassure victims it was not their fault. Too often domestic abuse and rape are seen as the victims fault and we need to challenge this perception and put the responsibility for the crime where it rightly belongs – with the perpetrator.



**NEXT LINK.** South Glos  
changing the face of  
domestic abuse support services



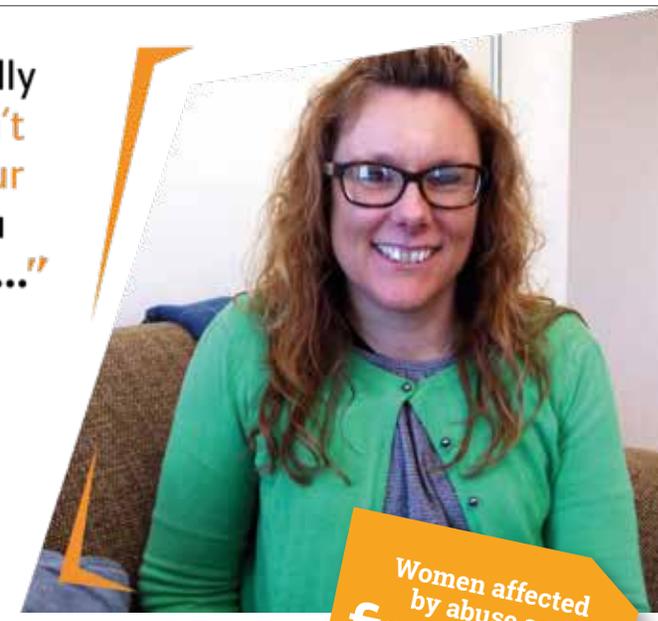
In 2017 we were awarded the commission to provide the domestic abuse services across South Gloucestershire County. Since then the service has established itself and already built a reputation for best practice and victim centred services.

This year we have supported **1030 victims** to cope, recover and rebuild their and their children's lives.

"Contacting us is a really positive step. You don't have to do this on your own. We'll be with you every step of the way..."

DAWN, NEXT LINK

#NoExcuse



Women affected by abuse are **five times** more likely to attempt suicide

### Single Point of Access

All the services are accessed by one telephone number **0800 4700280** or fax and email.

We also have **LiveZilla (live chat line)** active on our duty desk from **1.00pm – 5.30pm Monday – Friday.**

All callers are put through to our triage service. All victims asking for support are offered a relevant service that meets their needs and responds to their immediate safety risks. Callers wanting advice and guidance can access our accredited advice service.

### Safe Houses for Women and Families

We have safe houses for single women, women with children and women with complex needs. The housing is direct access and women and children can move in immediately and they can stay for up to six months. During that time they have practical and emotional support including staying safe, parenting, life skills and finding new housing.

This year we received **84 referrals** and housed **43 victims.**



*It really is a lifeline.*

### Safe House for Men

We have a dedicated house for male victims of domestic abuse who need a safe place to stay. They can stay for up to 6 months and have support with safety, benefits, legal and housing options.

### Community and Outreach IDVA Services

Community workers offer practical and emotional support to help female and male victims who are assessed as medium and standard risk to keep safe in their own home. The support we can offer includes someone to talk things over with, forming a safety plan, making the home

safe, help to go to court and get legal protection, help with accessing benefits and budgeting. The support is reduced as victims feel more safe.

This year the Community Workers supported **263 victims**

Outreach IDVA workers support high risk victims to keep them safe, refer them to the MARAC and to work in a multi-agency way to ensure their lives are protected and they are empowered to make positive choices/decisions, increase their confidence, safety and recovery.

This year the IDVAs supported **281 victims**

### Identification and Referral to Improve Safety (IRIS)

For many victims of domestic abuse going to see the doctor is the only safe place they can go without their violent partner present. Our specialist domestic violence advocate-educators train and support primary care clinicians to recognise domestic abuse and refer their female patients to our service. The IRIS workers offer emotional and practical support and if appropriate help to access a range of specialist services.

In South Glos we supported **74 families** and trained **61 clinical** and **10 non clinical staff**.

### Southmead Hospital IDVA Service

Often victims who present at A&E disclose high levels of abuse and are still living with their violent partner. This service supports female and male victims who present at the Emergency Department and Maternity Services at Southmead Hospital. They also train health clinicians to recognise the signs and symptoms of domestic abuse to enable them to refer to the service. Support is offered for up to 4 weeks.

This year we supported **224 victims**.

### Access and Response Team (ART) Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) Pilot

This is a new pilot where the IDVA will be co-located and embedded within ART and MASH. Their role will be to bring specialist knowledge of Domestic Violence and Abuse (DVA) to the decision making processes that exist within ART and MASH. Their role will also include increasing the knowledge base of all practitioners with ART and MASH. The IDVA will be expected to link with and refer into the wider DVA Support Services delivered by Next Link in South Gloucestershire.

**“ To know where there is help is so important.**



**“ I was so happy to talk to someone and have someone to listen and to help.**

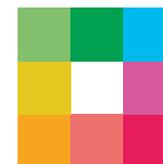
**“ My kids shouldn't have to suffer and now they are safe too.**





## Honour Based Violence and Forced Marriage Service

This is a service for victims who have either been victims of honour based violence or forced into marriage or are at risk of forced marriage. The service offers confidential advice and support to look at all the options available including accessing legal remedies to keep them safe and help them to plan their future. We have a secure live chat facility where we can talk to victims in real time safely.



**SAFELINK.**  
transforming victims' lives



## Group Programme

This programme is open to all victims aged 16 years and over regardless of if they are using any of our services. It includes Freedom Programme groups and Recovery Toolkit groups. The groups focus on both emotional and practical support including; self-esteem, confidence, coping strategies, skills and competencies, building friendship network, independence, ambition. To access these groups contact the telephone advice helpline.

This year we ran **5 groups** in Patchway, Yate and Staple Hill.



## Accredited Advice and Guidance

Our Advice Quality Standard accreditation confirms

we deliver well-managed domestic abuse advice services. Available through the single point of access or through our live chat facility staff have relevant up-to-date knowledge to provide high quality advice to victims, professionals and others seeking help.



## AN INTRODUCTION TO SAFE LINK

SAFE Link was established in 2008 and is a service that works across the Avon and Somerset Police Area and provides emotional and practical support to women, children and male victims of rape and sexual assault. It was recommissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner in 2015. The service follows the Revised Victims Code of Practice.

The service offers:

- **Independent Sexual Violence Advisors**
- **Dedicated Adult and child IDVSA for victims of historic abuse**
- **Dedicated Young Persons ISVA**
- **Children's ISVA**
- **BME ISVA**
- **Specialist Learning Disabilities ISVA**
- **Peer support groups**

We have 8 Independent Sexual Violence Advisors, 5 for adults and 3 for children and young people, two specialising in historic abuse and one peer support worker. All offer confidential advice, practical and emotional support including a safe place to talk, access to counselling, support attending Sexual Health Services and help with medical attention. They also can help with supporting the family and practical problems such as help with housing, benefits and employment.

If the victim wants to report to the police they can give support with making a statement, assist with claims for compensation and give support before, during and after the court process.

**“ I felt heard and understood.**



**“ I gave the best evidence I could and this was due to your support.**

The victim does not have to report to the police to access the service and the rape or sexual assault can have happened recently or in the past.

The workers work in partnership with the Police and our specialist sexual violence services and are based in hubs in

- **Keynsham, BaNES with Lighthouse,**
- **Concorde House, South Gloucestershire with PROTECT Investigation team**
- **Express Park, Bridgwater, Somerset with PROTECT Investigation team**
- **New Bridewell, Bristol with Lighthouse team**
- **Kenneth Steele House, Bristol with PROTECT Investigation team**
- **MIND in Taunton**

We also provide drop-ins in at

- **Somerset West at Bridgwater and Taunton colleges**
- **North Somerset at Weston college**
- **BaNES at Bath Spa University**

Staff deliver support by

- **One to one support in person and by telephone**
- **Peer support groups**
- **Training and practical skills sessions**
- **Use of email, text, Skype and WhatsApp.**



This year we supported  
**1057**  
victims  
to cope  
and recover

## Triage

During 2017/18 we introduced a Triage initial assessment process which we have incorporated into our case management system. To ensure we target the most vulnerable victims the support offered is based on needs and not on crime type. Triage referrals has improved the prioritisation and targeting 1-1 ISVA support; by carrying out an initial assessment of risk and needs at referral, those victims identified with high needs and risk and those who are moving through a police process are accepted into the service and allocated a named ISVA. For referrals who do not want the service or whose needs can be met through very short term interventions, signposting or onward referral they are supported by the triage worker and closed (without entering the full service).



**“ I couldn't have gone through the police process without my worker I didn't feel strong enough. ”**

## Safety and Support Assessment (SAS)

During 2017 /18 we started using the Safety and Support Assessment (SAS) and toolkit developed by Lime Culture, the assessment tool is built into our Oasis Case Management system and our staff have been trained and are competent in its use.

The SAS assessment provides structure and consistency for staff and clients, the development of the support plan and support offered by the ISVA is tailored to the identified needs of each individual victim.

Examples of the areas that are addressed within the assessment and support plan are:

- Safety; harm from others
- Health and medical
- Reporting to the police
- Mental health and psychological wellbeing
- Coping mechanisms, social and cultural support
- Safeguarding
- Employment and education
- Finance
- Accommodation and housing

This year **1018 victims** were referred to the service of these **662 adult victims** accessed the full service and **140 were supported through triage.**

**197 Children and Young People** under 18 accessed the service and **19 were supported through triage.**

**Number of reported sexual offences rose by 28% in Bristol last year.**

SAFE Link in partnership with Womankind was awarded Home Office funding (applied for on our behalf by Avon and Somerset Police and Crime Commission) SAFE Link are funded to provide a specialist ISVA and Womankind are funded to provide a specialist befriending service. The partnerships aim is to work together to improve lives and build resilience for the most vulnerable victims of sexual assault who have additional needs linked to either learning difficulties or mental ill-health.

## Specialist Learning Disabilities ISVA service and Drop In

We know people with Learning Disabilities have a higher propensity for being a victim of rape or sexual abuse than others in the wider community, yet the barriers they can face when trying to seek help means they often remain hidden and unsupported. Communication difficulties can impact on whether they are understood or believed and they can sometimes be seen as unreliable witnesses so their case will rarely progress to court. Our Learning Disabilities ISVA will offer specialist support to enable victims to

- Tell their story in the way best for them
- Have help with benefits
- Have help with housing
- Have help with reporting to the police if they wish
- Learn about healthy/safe relationships and when to say yes
- Have help to start putting their life back

## Drop In

Our Learning Disabilities Drop In is based at the South Gloucestershire Learning Disabilities Team in Church Road.

The drop is held each month and offers face to face confidential advice, information about options, pre-referral and/or referral into our specialist service. We will also offer advice and information to family members or carers.

Being based at the Learning Disabilities team, the ISVA will also be able to talk to professionals about any concerns they may have about a client and be able to refer directly into the service.



“ The ISVA helped my son in a way I never could, I am so grateful.

### Services for Men and Boys

Men and boys can be victims too. Rape and sexual assault happen far more often than statistics indicate. It happens in all communities and cultures.

We are here to help. Our Safe Link workers can support victims to cope with what happened and help them recover fully and get their life back. It is a free and confidential service. We can come to the victim or they can come to one of our hubs near them.

No matter how long ago the rape or sexual assault happened anyone can still

- have our help
- have counselling
- get advice
- report it
- access other specialist services.

Our support is totally confidential and victims can just talk to us once or, if they prefer, we can give them ongoing support.

“ I wouldn't have reported to the police if my ISVA hadn't supported me.

Chat live online to one of our support workers at [www.safelinksupport.co.uk](http://www.safelinksupport.co.uk) click on "live chat NOW" (Monday to Friday 1:00pm – 5:30pm)

### Truth Project

We also provide support to victims who want to give evidence to the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) Truth Project. Two of our Safe Link ISVA's are specially trained to offer victims of institutional abuse support while they share their experiences to the inquiry.

“ Talking about it to someone outside of my family has really helped ... and coming here each week.

“ Before the support from the ISVA service I was broken, I pushed everyone away.

197 children and young people under 18 accessed the service and 19 were supported through triage.



“ I have had a promotion at work and I am in a new and happy relationship.

### Peer Support

This is our fourth year of running peer support groups funded by Comic Relief. Our peer support programme is made up of actual and virtual support groups. Each group has up to six victims meeting in a closed setting to talk about their feelings and learn from each other. The programme consists of 10 sessions, each with a theme including: flashbacks and nightmares; trust; sleep; safe relationships; managing thoughts and feelings; healthy body/healthy mind; anger and triggers, support from family and friends; coping mechanisms; future hopes and goals.

Some members of the first group are now training to become peer facilitators and they will go on to run new groups. The virtual group uses WhatsApp to communicate and support each other and is a closed group.

This year we ran 4 peer support programmes.

“ Having staff checking on me to see if I was OK was invaluable and made me feel safe and secure.

### Promoting and Raising Awareness of Rape and Sexual Abuse

During the year we continued our ongoing training of STO officers, investigation teams and Lighthouse teams across the whole of Avon and Somerset. We also delivered training to and networked with: AVoice, SARI, Young Victims service, SARSAS, Womankind, and Next Link Complex Needs Safe House. We took part in a number of events including the #It's Not OK campaign, promoting the service at various fairs and events and had a stall in the City Centre.

“ If you see it, believe it.



5 Queen Square, Bristol BS1 4JQ

t: 0117 925 1811  
f: 0117 929 3290  
e: enquiries@missinglinkhousing.co.uk  
twitter @MissingLink\_MLH  
www.missinglinkhousing.co.uk



t: 0117 925 0680  
f: 0117 929 3290  
e: enquiries@nextlinkhousing.co.uk  
twitter @NextLinkHousing  
www.facebook.com/nextlinkhousing  
www.nextlinkhousing.co.uk



t: 0800 4700 280  
f: 0117 929 3290  
e: enquiries.southglos@nextlinkhousing.co.uk  
twitter @NextLinkHousing  
www.facebook.com/nextlinkhousing  
www.nextlinkhousing.co.uk/southglos



t: 0333 323 1543  
f: 0117 929 3290  
e: safe.link@safelinksupport.co.uk  
www.safelinksupport.co.uk

Missing Link strives to create a culture that encourages and values everyone's differences and promotes mutual respect and shared understanding.

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